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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to provide input for the Rio Grande National Forest DRAFT WINTER TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN. I own and operate a four-yurt system in the Rio Grande National Forest under the business name Southwest Nordic Center LLC. The first yurt was erected in the fall of 1987. I am specifically concerned with the area accessed between Cumbres and La Manga Passes. I would like to see a plan that makes an attempt to reduce conflicts between user groups, allows for both skiers/snowshoers and snowmobilers to have a positive environment for their chosen activity, and provides a buffer around the yurts as stated in my permit. Historically there were conflicts between skiers and snowmobilers. This resulted in the Conejos Peak Ranger District ranger Carlos Pinto creating a voluntary separation plan (please see attached letter and map) in the 1990's. Conceptually it represented an attempt to allow skiers to use the terrain west of CO 17 and snowmobilers the east in the Cumbres Pass area, except for access to Trujillo Meadows Reservoir.. This plan did have a positive effect of being clear as to where the non-motorized areas were. In addition, it made each user group aware of their impacts on the other. It also kept/identified the Neff Mtn area as special to skiers. At a later date a new map was posted at trailheads attempting to redefine the voluntary separation (please find map attached). As far as I know this is what is currently the standard. One thing that stands out to me is that all of my yurts as well as Spruce Hole are designated as areas for skiers and not snowmobiles. This makes sense since the people using the yurts are largely skiers/snowshoers. It upholds the quality of the experience for those users for which I am permitted to provide. This is the best alternative that I have seen so far.

Of the four proposed alternatives I am most in support of alternative 4. While it doesn't set aside much terrain for skiers/snowshoers it at least recognizes the conflict inherent in not setting any terrain aside. I would like to see a buffer zone around the Yurts included on the map. Ideally, large enough to create a quiet zone and provide a sense of safety from intrusion. If you need the GPS points for any of the yurts I will gladly provide them. I do like that Neff Mtn is still set aside as a Nordic area.

Multi-use implies that more than one user group can enjoy the forest. While there may be more snowmobilers, skiers/snowshoers still represent a significant percentage of the users in this area. It is naïve to think that not setting any areas aside for people who want to experience the forest under their own propulsion is an equitable management perspective. Skiers/snowshoers are limited by their mode of transport to areas relatively close to the highway. Restricting ski/snowshoe areas to only the South San Juan Wilderness is not realistic. Having at least some areas that are quiet and safe in the National Forest is not too much to expect. A management plan that doesn't provide for that is not really multi-use.